Black Muslims Would Sell Farm to Klan

3/17/77

By JAMES T. WOOTEN
Special to The New York Times

ASHVILLE, Ala., March 16 — A farm owned by Black Muslims and plagued by the deaths of 30 poisoned cattle will be sold "to the Ku Klux Klan or anybody who wants it," its manager announced here today.

"No use staying where people ain't civilized," said John H. Davis, the manager, as he supervised the round-up of what was once a $30,000 herd of 300 Hereford and Angus cows.

Now their ranks reduced by sniper fire and poisoned water, there are 223 left, and they are to be moved to another farm in Alabama that the black separatist group owns.

"We're just going to get out from amongst these heathen," the 51-year-old Mr. Davis said. He looked out across the rolling hills of the 376-acre farm that were dotted with the stiff-legged bodies of the bulls, pregnant cows and calves that died last week.

The farm has been the center of controversy in this northeastern Alabama county since it was purchased last fall from a white car dealer. Soon after the sale the formr owner, Ray Wyatt, became the target of an apparent vendetta. His business was burned, acid was poured on his cars and his life threatened.

Snipers Shot Cattle

In November, according to Mr. Davis 25 cattle in the Muslim herd were shot by snipers hiding in the dense pine woods that surround the farm. Last week, 30 more died after drinking water from troughs in which a white powdery substance was later found. A local veterinarian said that it appeared to be cyanide.

Mr. Davis, a Lutheran who came to St. Clair County 22 years ago when fewer than 20 Negroes were registered to vote, believes that the Klan is behind the series of incidents.

Robert M. Shelton, Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America, has said that his organization is leasing or buying the land around the Muslim farm "to keep an eye on things." Records at the county courthouse here in Ashville do not show any purchases by Mr. Shelton or the Klan. He is scheduled to speak in this town of 1,000 people on Friday night.

Mr. Davis is regarded by some of St. Clair's white citizens as a "troublemaker," perhaps because of his role in voter registration campaigns that have added 1,000 Negroes to the county list.

"We're waiting for the state toxicology lab to tell us what kind of poison it was before we begin an investigation," said Joel N. Wood, the county sheriff. "We definitely are going to be diligent in this and try to bring the guilty people to justice."

Manager Accuses Sheriff

Sheriff Wood is "just making sure he doesn't trouble the waters," Mr. Davis said, because he is a candidate for clerk of the Circuit Court. "He could find out who's doing this if he wanted to," he charged.

The surviving cattle will be transferred to a 3,600-acre farm owned by the group in Greene County, Ala., where the population is prediminantly Negro and where Negroes captured most of the county offices last year.

"We think it'll be better there," said Mr. Davis, who has been in charge of the farm since it was purchased. "But you can never be sure, because this kind of thing is condoned by the state, from the Governor and the Attorney General on down, and it could happen again anywhere."

The Muslims also own another farm in St. Clair County, which they purchased from Mr. Wyatt. The second is a 531-acre parcel. The total purchase price for the two farms was $236,000, and Mrs. Davis says they can be bought now for approximately $270,000.

"We made a lot of imprivements," he said. "We don't want any profit, and we'll sell to anybody, including the Klan."